SUPPLEMENT E5

Report
Task group: Sustainable Ministry
(policy and guidelines when Ministry Support is applied for)

1. Mode of operation

1.1 The task group was constituted on 8 August with the following members:

Rinus Wassermann	Kerk-in-Suid	Present
Willem Pelser	Koedoeskop	Present
Frans de Beer	Springbokvlakte	Apology
Johan Haasbroek	Central-Africa	Present
Dewald Roux	Vorentoe	Present
Louis Pretorius	Naboomspruit	Present
Peet Venter	Pietpotgietersrust	Present
Nicole Forrest-Hamman	Waterkloofrif	Present
Hannes Peens	Marken	Present
Dawie Rotteveel	Pretoria-Tuine	Apology
Carl Louwrens	Emeritus & Bridging Minister	Present
Paul Grobler	Northern Synod	Present
Malan Nel	NG Stellastraat	Present
Rehan Rheeder	Northern Synod	Present

1.2 At this meeting

- the Rev. Paul Grobler informed the members about the Synodical Service Council instruction and request;
- Malan Nel made some observations, based on relevant literature, about the characteristics of sustainable congregations / churches;
- there was a comprehensive discussion about policy and procedures when congregations apply for Ministry Support;
- attention was paid to the synod's need to ensure that the church family invests in viable and sustainable church ministries.

We gave ourselves three 'instructions':

- **A pro forma for a healthy congregation, mindful of its calling**

- Carl Louwrens – convener
- Nicole, Hannes, Willem
- **Diagnostic process for an application for support:**
- Rinus Wassermann– convener
- Peet, Louis, Johan
- **Character of congregations to whom funds and help are provided.**
- Rehan Rheeder & Paul Grobler
- **Creative Communication about findings for the future**
- Dewald Roux

1.3 At the meeting on 24 October 2023 the first three abovementioned reports were presented. This was followed by a fruitful discussion on congregations' contextual dissimilarities. Broader consensus was reached about matters mentioned in the reports by Carl Louwrens and Rinus Wasserman (with additional comments by Malan Nel). The meeting instructed Rinus Wasserman, Carl Louwrens and Malan Nel to combine the two reports and to prepare it as the task group's report to the SSC.

In January 2024 the combined report was circulated to be evaluated and revised. This revised report the task group now presents to the synod.

2 We agree on the following points:

2.1 The support fund is of critical importance, and we can assume that it will become even more so as the circumstances of congregations become even more challenging.

2.2 Although the Synod is committed to serve the congregations, and should therefore support them as much as possible, the issue of sustainability is equally important.

2.3 Honest, empathetic means must be found to support congregations to find sustainable solutions.

2.4 A fair investigation into the needs and sustainability of applicant congregations should help the Synod, as part of the church family, to maintain responsible stewardship of the offerings by the congregations.

3 Background information

As a background to the following we append

3.1 **POLICY AND PROCEDURES: CONTRIBUTIONS TO SHARED WORK (CSW) AND MINISTRY SUPPORT (Attachment 1)**

3.2 **MINISTRY SUPPORT FOR CONGREGATIONS 2016-2017 and 2021-2022 (Attachment 2)**

3.3 **Sustainable ministry (Attachment 3)**

(Pro forma for healthy congregations mindful of their calling)

Should the document below be approved, it will affect policy, and so the Task Group is available (in collaboration with the Office of the Synod) to realign the policy to match the resolutions.

We propose below **to investigate sustainability and request the SSC to approve the proposal—please refer to the recommendation at the end of the report.**

4 **What should a commission of a presbytery and/or task group of the synod take into account?**

It is probably a given that finances are the direct cause of an application for support. What should, in addition, be considered in the decision on providing support?

In principle, each congregation has a future. An impasse (mostly because of finances) presents the opportunity to reflect on the nature and shape of such a future. We assume that this reflection transpires in consultation with the Presbytery and, when necessary, also with the broader church family. Below are some markers in the debate about future sustainability and its nature, whatever form it may take, e.g. as an independent congregation, as a collaboration, or by merging with another congregation.

4.1 **Basic analysis**

A short questionnaire should determine at least the following:

- Worship service attendance
- Number of congregants containing:
  - Total
  - Ages
  - Male/female
  - Duration of residence in the congregation
- Church council members —number, men/women and ages
- Income levels of congregants
- Ministries functioning in and through the congregational context, for example:
  - Communal care
  - Youth Ministry
  - Missional service in context
- How does the pastoral care for the congregation transpire?

- Number and regularity of worship services
- Who leads the services?

4.2 **Why is the congregation important?**

The church council prepares a few paragraphs explaining the congregation's purpose.

Should the Synod, based 4.1 and 4.2 above, agree to support the congregation, we propose that

4.2.1 the Synod considers giving financial aid, but that (in consultation with the presbytery) discussions with the congregation should urgently focus on 4.3 and 4.4 below;

4.2.2 the Synod seriously considers, in cases where sustainability is questionable, to make it a condition for further support — among other things because of the need for responsible stewardship in the church family.

4.3 What should be happening?

Relevant questions are pointers toward healthy congregations—or: the healthy diet of healthy congregations.

4.3.1 Congregants (not only church council members) are trained and empowered to

- take part in the worship service;
- undertake pastoral and mutual care for one another;
- participate in the *didache* of the congregation;
- render service witness in the context and community;
- leadership and administration in the congregation.

4.3.2 The above should happen, and if not, a long-term ministry is unsustainable. It is this critical matter that raises the issue of the need for a ministry by a trained theologian (clergyman).

4.3.3 Missional congregations sometimes shrink in congregant numbers but do not disappear. It is necessary to fathom a congregation's missional awareness. Two things help to measure this awareness:

- What 20% of the worshippers answer to the question: What would the people in our area miss if tomorrow our congregation ceases to exist?
- What percentage would 20% of the regular churchgoers award to the cultural intelligence of the leaders?

- ‘Cultural intelligence (CQ) is ‘the capability to deal effectively with other people with whom the person does not share a common cultural background and understanding’.
- ‘CQ – it will hardly come naturally. ‘Culture is a group’s way of living, way of thinking, and way of behaving in the world, for which we need understanding and empathy to guide listeners toward Christian maturity’.
- ‘Cultural Intelligence (CQ)resembles Emotional Intelligence (EQ), which measures one’s capacity for relational and interpersonal skills.’
- ‘Four stages proposed by Livermore to develop CQ. These stages are:

    1 CQ Drive: What’s your motivation for engaging with the cultural dimensions of this project?

    2. CQ Knowledge: What cultural differences will most influence this project?

    3. CQ Strategy: How will you plan in light of the cultural differences?

    4. CQ Action: How do you need to adapt your behaviour to function effectively on this project?’

- Livermore in his ‘CQ Map’ had as one of the central dimensions of this development: ‘love: desire -----> ability’. We are ‘compelled’ by a desire to represent God in this culturally diverse world and to do so with cultural intelligence.’

4.3.4 The absolute need for a congregational diagnosis: At least 20% of the regular worshippers must participate in a congregational diagnosis and discern for themselves how matters stand with the congregation’s eight ministries: worship service (liturgy and preaching); pastorate; interpersonal relationships; teaching and equipping; service witness (martyria and diakonia); administration.

4.3.5 The synod takes the lead in training people to manage congregational diagnoses. (Such training is already part of the annual Excelsus presentations.) It is recommended that at least one person per presbytery should be trained—to accompany a diagnosis in which the congregation discerns for itself how matters stand and what ought to happen next. The presbytery of which the congregation is part is directly involved in such a process.

4.4 **What are we going to do about this?**

4.4.1 Any good diagnosis leads to a congregational process of discernment about the way forward. If 20% of the regular churchgoers form a thinktank, with input from

as many other congregants as possible—after the findings and selections during a congregational diagnosis — choices are made, in a process of discernment, about the way forward. These include:

- Urgent, sometimes 'surgical' interventions in matters that need immediate attention.
- Reflection and discernment about the congregation's contextual mission ('Why do we want to be here and stay here?')
- Ongoing and intentional becoming who we already are in Christ: this includes changes in identity, mission, culture, and operational procedures.
- Transforming leadership by means of Cultural Intelligence.

The synod may consider, as part of the usual application form and in consultation with the presbytery of which the applying congregation is part, to insist that the congregation must undergo testing for sustainability.

5 Recommendations:

1 In principle, the SSC accepts that each congregation has a future. An impasse (mostly because of finances) presents the opportunity to reflect on the nature and shape of such a future. We assume that this reflection must transpire in consultation with the presbytery and, when necessary, also with the broader church family. Below are some markers in the debate about future sustainability and its nature, whatever form it may take, e.g. as an independent congregation, as a collaboration, or by merging with another congregation.

2 The congregation needing financial support must, after a thorough consultation with the presbytery, apply on their own behalf to the SSC.

3 The SSC, in consultation with the Presbyterial Commission, processes the application with the congregation directly, and according to synodical policy.

4 The SSC decides to accept the abovementioned framework as part of its process of lending support from the Ministry Fund, and in the interest of the sustainability of the congregation.

5 The SSC directs the Task Team for Ministry Support to align the existing policy with the abovementioned framework

AND

6 to adapt the usual application process in such a way that the applying congregation is aware of what the church family expects of it when it considers providing support.

7 The SSC directs the office to make it clear, when marketing the Ministry Support Fund, that a responsible expectation of sustainability exists—to

reassure the church family, when it contributes to the fund, of ongoing, responsible stewardship.

Malan Nel
06 February 2024

Resources

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